

From an Angle to a Filial Daughter: Lin Shu's Rewriting of Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop

Sihui Chen

Central South University of Forestry Science and Technology, Changsha 410000, China

Abstract: Nell, the protagonist in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is an angle but was translated into a filial daughter adhering to the Confucian doctrines by Lin Shu in late Qing China. The translator, Lin Shu reshaped Nell's appearance, mental activities and behaviors to construct a role model of filial piety. Lin's translation is actually rewriting. Such rewriting is necessary to fulfill his translation purposes: to defuse the national crisis by introducing beneficial elements from Western culture; to re-glorify the Confucian doctrines by proving that the Westerners upheld the same morality as those in traditional China. This paper thus argues that translation, the means of introducing foreign images, is a vehicle for Lin Shu to construct and imagine self-image.

Keywords: Lin Shu's translated novels, Self-image, Other-image, Filial daughter.

1. Lin Shu's Translations and the Construction of Self-image

In the late Qing Dynasty, Lin Shu (1852-1924), a prestigious scholar and prolific translator in Chinese history, proposed to learn Western knowledge (Xi xue) so as to awaken his compatriots and rejuvenate China. Also, he is an adherent to Confucian doctrines, firmly believing that Confucianism can strengthen social morality. However, at that time, some radical reformers advocated full westernization and violently attacked traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism. Therefore, translation is a tool for Lin Shu to prove that Western learning is acceptable, but more importantly, it serves as a vehicle to demonstrate the value of Confucianism (Liu, 2010). Since Western learning was admired by the majority of late Qing intellectual elites, Lin sought to illustrate that the 'progressive' Westerners upheld the same morality and extolled the same virtues as Confucian scholars. In other words, Lin Shu highlighted the homogeneity between Western and Chinese cultures rather than the heterogeneity through translation. It is thus understandable that Lin Shu's translation is cultural reformation and rewriting (He & He, 2010). Western literature provided Lin Shu with substantial resources to imagine and construct ideal characters who embodied both the positive aspects of Western culture as well as Chinese traditional virtues, particularly filial piety. With these role models he attempted to strengthen morality and boost morale, thus contributing to revivify the country and benefit his fellow citizens.

For this purpose, he often took great pains in reframing the original stories with filial piety, which may be illustrated by the recurrent 'filial daughter' or 'filial son' in the titles of his translated works. Among these works, *A Biography of a Filial Daughter; Nai Er (Xiao Nü Nai Er Zhuan (1907))* is widely read and studied because in it Lin Shu proved that filial piety is not unique to China but shared universally. It was translated from *The Old Curiosity Shop* written by Dickens (1841). A prolific translator as Lin Shu is, he did not know foreign languages and had to cooperate with others, so *The Old Curiosity Shop* was translated by Lin Shu and Wei Yi. Wei narrated this story orally while Lin translated it. Such a

translating mode gave Lin Shu freedom in reframing the story to achieve his moral and political purposes. *The Old Curiosity Shop* tells a tragic story of the owner of a decaying old curiosity store and his granddaughter, Nell. To earn his granddaughter a decent living, the grandfather resorted to gambling, but unfortunately fell into the trap of the greedy Quilp, so they are forced to flee London, drifting from place to place. This story may be interpreted as an indictment of Western industrial civilization and a critique of human desires. Also it shows a sympathy for the tragic fate of underprivileged people (Sun, 2010). In the context of Chinese self-strengthening discourse, Lin Shu rendered this satirical novel into a memoir of a Western 'filial daughter', where the love of God in the original text is substituted by Chinese filial piety, and the angel-like Nell is reshaped into a filial daughter, upholding Confucian values. Lin's purpose was not to criticize the notorious industrial capitalism, or depict the hardship of Western people to Chinese readers: Nell was introduced as part of evidence that Western culture preserves the same morality as those in China.

The current study of Lin's translated novels with the theme of filial piety generally focus on the function of Lin's translation to his defence of traditional moral principles (Chen & Cheng, 2014; Li, 2016; Wang, 2019), but detailed analysis of Lin Shu's rewriting strategies is inadequate. This paper therefore concentrates on the specific strategies deployed by Lin Shu in constructing a 'filial daughter' who may serve as a role model for Chinese youngsters.

2. The Reshaping of Nell

2.1. Nell's Appearance: from an Angel to a Mortal Girl

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Nell is endowed by God with benevolence, courage and resolution. Thanks to these virtues, she led her grandfather out of suffering, and Dickens more than once explicated that Nell is an angel on earth. However, Christianity, which preaches selflessness and equality for all, is vastly different to Confucianism that advocates ancestor worship and the hierarchy of social relations. When the Qing Empire was struggling, the traditional Confucian ethics were also under challenge because a majority of Chinese people believed that Western knowledge could bring prosperity to the

nation at that time. As a defender of Confucianism, Lin Shu had done his utmost to prevent Western religion from threatening the existing Confucian social order, so he attempted to seek the homogeneity between Confucian and Western cultures, especially devotion and filial piety, to prove the value of Western knowledge and the vitality of Confucianism (He, 2020). Therefore, the original description of Nell as an angel was omitted, and the girl was reshaped into an ordinary child with a delicate complexion. This makes her filial behaviors reasonable in the Western discourse.

When the narrator first meets Nell, he believes that the girl's unconditional trust in strangers should come from the love of God, but Lin replaced it with children's intrinsic purity and kindness.

I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us. As I had felt pleased at first by her confidence, I determine to deserve it, and to do credit to the nature which had prompted her to repose it in me. (Dickens, 2004:5)

知此女信我至深，奈何以机关探其隐事。因思女既委身信我，我必曲从其意。(Since the little girl trusted me deeply, how can I intrigue her. I will definitely accommodate to her and win her heart.) (Lin, 1907 Vol 1:4) (my translation, hereafter)

Apart from covering Nell's divine behaviors, Lin also rendered her angel image into natural beauty. In the Chinese culture, the term '迨类飞仙(fairy-like)' usually refers to a woman whose outlook is gorgeous and stunning, but it does not mean that she is an immortal. This rewriting once again eliminated the Christian elements of Nell.

'I have been used, you see,' said Kit, 'to talk and think of her, almost as if she was an angel. (Dickens, 2004:465)

吾恒对尔述耐儿，描写其状迨类飞仙。(I have always told you that Nell is like a fairy, stunning and extraordinary.) (Lin, 1907, Vol 3:123)

Moreover, Nell and her grandfather are more like pilgrims to Heaven than drifters in the original text. But Lin Shu erased these Christian elements. A wonderful example of this is that he deliberately altered 'angle's guidance' into a 'command' (Hao ling), showing that Nell is matured enough to shoulder the responsibility as a filial daughter:

His forehead bedewed with the cold sweat of fear: and, bending before the child as if she had been an angle messenger sent to lead him where she would, made ready to follow her. (Dickens, 2004:285)

老人立起汗渍其额，鞠躬，待耐儿号令。(His forehead bedewed with the cold sweat of fear, bending before the child and waiting for her command.) (Lin, 1907 Vol 2:118)

Faced with the unprecedented national crisis, the late Qing intellectuals were, in fact, ambivalent about Western learning: they regarded it as a remedy to rejuvenate China, but also worried about the invasion of Western culture. In the translation of *A Biography of a Filial Daughter, Nai Er*, Lin successfully found the culture affinity between Nell's love of God and the Confucian filial piety as both can be interpreted as the love for families. To replace the core of Christianity with that of Confucianism, Lin diluted the divine character in the original and highlighted Nell's image of a mortal girl who

can do her filial duty. This reduces culture conflicts and ultimately combines Western learning with Confucianism. Based on Nell's original features, Lin constructed a filial daughter whose original Christian features disappeared without trace. She may then serve as the vehicle to advocate the value of filial piety, which prevents foreign ideas from invading into traditional Chinese culture.

2.2. Nell's Mental Activities: from Discouragement to Grief

Charles Dickens mainly focused on Nell's transcendent and divine qualities rather than her mental suffering in the original text. Thanks to God who endows Nell with strong spiritual power, she is able to overcome difficulties and ultimately complete her pilgrimage with her grandfather. But to construct a role model of filial piety, Lin deviated substantially from Dickens's version and rewrote Nell's experience into a painful journey. So Nell always felt the same way as her grandfather, including all the pain and sadness.

Although Nell already feels alone and discouraged after suffering the hardships of her family in the original, Lin brought Nell closer to traditional Chinese culture by intensifying Nell's grief.

Yet, in all the hurry and crowding of such a time, the child was more alone than she had ever been before; alone in spirit, alone in her devotion to him who was wasting away upon his burning bed; alone in her unfeigned sorrow, and her unpurchased sympathy. (Dickens, 2004:74)

病榻之前，纷扰者多，但愿留心病叟舍耐儿外无第二人，万愁填咽。(Many people come to visit the grandfather, but only Nell is truly concerned about the old man. Thinking about that, the girl is in the worst pain that others can not image.) (Lin, 1907 Vol 1:72)

Feeling for the time as though, go where they would, they were to be hunted down, and could never be safe but in hiding, her heart failed her, and her courage dropped. (Dickens, 161)

长道悠悠，随处均有巡骑，非伏匿不出几不可图存，于是胆力全馁，不知所云。(Patrols are everywhere in the upcoming journey. Thinking that hiding is the only way to survive, Nell is totally drained and overwhelmed with confusion.) (Lin, Vol 2: 9)

Lin shu substituted Nell's innocent smile with a forced one to comfort her grandfather, showing her adult-like maturity and strength even though she is still a child. These virtues reflect Nell's effort in fulfilling her 'filial duty' in the dilemma.

But now she soothed him with gentle and tender words, smiled at his thinking they could ever part, and rallied him cheerfully upon the jest. (Dickens, 2004:105)

今兹耐儿则强笑慰其大父，且以雅谑娱老人。(Bur now she puts on a smiling face to comfort her grandfather, and even amuses the old man with jokes.) (Lin, 1907 Vol 1:99)

According to Confucianism, a qualified 'filial son' or 'filial daughter' would inevitably grieve and be hard to move on when losing their parents (Hu, 2009). Lin Shu himself is a renowned filial son. He recalled in *Collected Works of Lin Qinnan* (1985) that he once prayed to Heaven that he was willing to exchange his frame and fortune for his mother passing away peacefully. He also suffered from lung disease

because of the unbearable sorrow after his father died. Filtered by Lin Shu's traditional filial framework, Nell becomes a qualified 'filial daughter', sharing weal and woe with her grandfather without any complaints. The rewriting of Nell's mental activities highlights the suffering endured by Nell to be a 'filial daughter' and her admirable filial piety while living in hardship.

2.3. Nell's Behaviors: from Sanctity to Filial Piety

Between the late Qing Dynasty and the May 4th period, Lin Shu, on one hand, was idealistic, considering that China could be rejuvenated simply by introducing the positive elements from Western learning; on the other hand, he took pains to fight against the invasion of foreign cultures and defend the rationality of Confucianism (Guan, 2021). To help Chinese people better accept Western learning, Lin attempted to integrate Western culture with Confucian moralities, especially filial piety. (He & He, 2010). Originally, Nell is a delicate angel with independence, conscience, and benevolence, but all these virtues were rewritten into filial piety in Lin's translation. This rewriting reconciles the image of a Western 'filial daughter' with the Confucian doctrines, so as to fulfill Lin's plan to demonstrate the value of Confucianism and avoid full Westernization at the same time.

Lin substituted Nell's strong spiritual power with the responsibility to support her grandfather as a filial daughter. A typical example is as follow:

With less and less of hope or strength, as they went on, but with an undiminished resolution not to betray by any word or sigh her sinking state, so long as she had energy to move, the child, throughout the remainder of that hard day, compelled herself to proceed: not even stopping to rest as frequently as usual, to compensate in some measure for the tardy pace at which she was obliged to walk. (Dickens, 2004:304)

希望既馁，力亦增疲，但以壮志助其孝思，力疾前行，不敢复息。(With less and less hope and strength, they are exhausted, but Nell still bears her filial duty in mind, which allows her to take care of her grandfather. She marched along, not daring to rest.) (Lin, 1907 Vol 2: 134)

Nell is praised as 'heroic' by the schoolmaster after knowing her tenacity, courage and self-sacrifice, but Lin striped away the descriptions and reframed Nell as a role model of 'filial daughter' who knocked over every difficulty to take care of her grandfather.

Has this child heroically persevered under all doubts and dangers, struggled with poverty and suffering, upheld and sustained by strong affection and the consciousness of rectitude alone! And yet the world is full of such heroism. (Dickens, 2004:310)

先生闻言大骇曰，奇孝哉。吾以为生人操行案由敦恳如是者，尽余书中所见孝义之人，万无及汝。(The schoolmaster was shocked by Nell's extraordinary filial behaviors. "I thought I already knew all the filial people from the book, but none of them can compare with you.") (Lin, 1907 Vol 2:138)

Lin also transformed Nell's transcendent understanding of death into a moral duty to serve her loved one. In the translation, Nell hopes that she can better fulfill her 'filial duties' after realizing the beauty of life.

But the sad scene she had witnessed, was not without its lesson of content and gratitude; of content with the lot which left her health and freedom; and gratitude that she was spared to the one relative and friend she loved, and to live and move in a beautiful world, when so many young creatures—as young and full of hope as she—were stricken down. (Dickens, 2004:173)

盖自谓年少飘零，尚幸无病，其感谢天心者，则谓己身不死，良足侍吾大父暮年。(Although I was drifting at a young age, I was fortunate not to get sick and pass away early, so that I could still look after my grandfather and let him live a relatively carefree live.) (Lin, 1907 Vol 3: 43)

As the Confucian doctrine is deeply rooted in Lin Shu's mind, he reflects his self-identity of a filial son on Nell's image in the Western culture. So in the reproduction of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Lin constructed Nell as a 'filial daughter' to replace 'the other image' — an angel from the West (Wang, 2019). In Lin's words, Nell is a spokesman of 'filial piety' from the Western world, demonstrating that the advanced Westerners upheld the same morality as Confucianism. At that time, the target readers only knew that Nell is a filial role model from the West and accepted her willingly. And the Western culture behind her is consequently, more acceptable.

3. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is clear that rewriting is Lin Shu's translation strategy. Lin reshaped Nell's appearance, mental activities and behaviors greatly to construct a role model of filial piety, rendering Nell, an angel, into an ordinary girl who fulfills her filial duty for her whole life. By giving the Confucian ethics to a Western character and depicting Nell's formation into an admirable 'filial daughter', Lin showed his fellow citizens the possibility of reviving China by integrating Western learning with tradition Chinese culture rather than full Westernization.

Translation, the means of introducing foreign cultures, often becomes a vehicle for translators' self-imagination. It is fair to say that translation is a two-way process, consisting of 'introducing the other' and 'constructing self' (He, 2020). Lin Shu's cultural stand is the main reason behind his translation of *A Biography of a Filial Daughter, Nai Er* in the early 20th century. At that time, Li Shu and the other late Qing intellectual elites intended to introduce Western Learning to rejuvenate China by translation, but their cultural stance was not the same. Some late Qing reformers, represented by Hu Shi, advocated full Westernization, while Lin insisted on the preservation of traditional Chinese ethics. Western learning is to revitalize Chinese culture rather than replace it. Therefore, Lin did not translate Nell's angel image in the original text as it was, but remolded it into a filial daughter, as filial piety is the core value of Confucianism. This may increase the acceptability of the Western novel in the Chinese social context. Nell's filial image not only proves that filial piety is universal, but also defends the Confucian ethics by showing that a Western character holds the same morality as those in China. What's more, Lin's manipulation of Nell's image reflects his cultural confidence to some extent. Every culture that survived crisis and disasters has its own value. If the development of Chinese culture is at the expense of the loss of its characteristics then the so-called national development,

revolution or modernization will become a disaster for Chinese culture (Zhang, 2010). For this perspective, Lin Shu's determination to defend Confucianism through translation is also understandable.

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